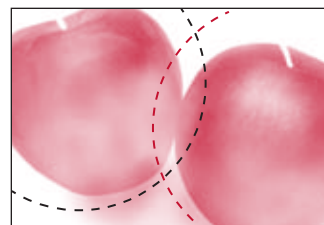


# BREAKING GROUND



**FRANKLIN FAMILY** PUSH *for*  
**LEAST RESTRICTIVE SETTING**  
*for their TWO SONS —*  
*and GET IT*



INCLUSIVE EDUCATION:  
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T E N N E S S E E  
C O U N C I L



DEVELOPMENTAL  
DISABILITIES

# BREAKING GROUND

NO.39 EDUCATION ISSUE

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*Cover photo by Gina Lynette*

## CONTACT INFORMATION



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# FRANKLIN FAMILY PUSH *for* LEAST RESTRICTIVE SETTING *for their* TWO SONS — and **GET IT**

BY JEROME FRANKLIN

Anyone connected to a child with a disability and

responsible for providing the best educational opportunities for that child has dealt with the decision of placement. Questions arise regarding the best classroom setting and the least restrictive environment for your child.

My name is Jerome Franklin. My wife, Annette, and I have two of the most awesome, wonderful, delightful teenagers that we know. That was not always the case. Our sons were not in the least restrictive environment that was best suited to their disabilities and personalities. This is our story; a journey that has taken several years, lots of frustration, tears, prayers and a quest for knowledge to become empowered parents and the best advocates for our children.

Our first encounter with seeking the best setting for our children started when we enrolled our eldest child, Scott, in the Metro Nashville/Davidson County School System as a kindergartener. At that time, we were unaware that our child had a disability. Scott's pre-school teachers had not mentioned or given us any indication that Scott was learning differently from his peers. He certainly had the knowledge that was required to enter kindergarten. Therefore, we took him to school on the first day as any proud parents would when their first child enters the "Big School".

We were excited about the school in which he was enrolled, because we had done our research and determined that it was a good one. In addition, we had received recommendations from other parents and neighbors. We were ready for a great year. Lo and behold, a few weeks in the school system changed our educational experiences, and we would never be the same again. Scott's first teacher told us that he was too immature for her class. Like us, she didn't realize that he had a disability. We voluntarily removed him from that school and placed him in our school of zone. That move would be the first of several moves and different teachers in our attempts to attain the best placement for Scott.

But even at the school of zone, Scott was having problems. He couldn't speak well at that time, and his means of communication was through touching. We had a meeting with the teacher and principal because they said they could not have him touching the other students. It was considered offensive and also could be viewed as sexual in nature. Scott was tested and was diagnosed as having mild mental retardation (MMR) by the school's psychologists.

At that point, we were told by the principal that the school did not provide services for children with special needs, which didn't sound right to me. Consequently, Scott had to be moved to yet another



Norman (left) and Scott Franklin

school. We had no idea about our parental rights, IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) or any other laws concerning children with disabilities. We went along with the school's recommendation because they were the experts, and surely they had the best interest of our child in mind!

So Scott was moved to his third school and he was still in his first semester of kindergarten! We were learning that Davidson County Schools provide special education services of the segregated, stand-alone classroom kind. Worst of all, it didn't take long to determine that my child wasn't learning. Instead, we experienced babysitting. The children were simply endured or tolerated until the time for school to be over. We also noticed that Scott was picking up habits that he didn't display before, because he was mimicking the other students. His behavior was not acceptable and out of control.

Annette and I enrolled Scott in a program called RIP, which is the Regional Intervention Program [see story on page 16]. This would mark the beginning of us empowering ourselves. This was the best program for managing his behavioral issues at that time, and he hasn't had a problem with behavior since the completion of the program. The light bulb came on and we discovered that what we know and how we use that knowledge can make a huge difference in our child's life.

From that point on, we were determined to learn all we could about children with disabilities. We began to seek whatever resources we could to educate and enlighten ourselves so that we could make

Photo by Gina Lynette



The Franklin Family

Photo by Gina Lynette

the best possible decisions and choices for Scott. We attended various workshops that were offered through the Kennedy Center at Vanderbilt University, and the church we attended—Mount Zion Baptist Church—had an Overcomers' Ministry for parents of children with disabilities. We became a part of that ministry and gained great knowledge from the heads of the ministry, Marsha and Robert Wilson, as well as other parents.

At one of these workshops, we met a man who would ultimately change our lives and our children's lives in ways that are hard to find words to express. His name is Ned Solomon. After the workshop, I talked about my situation and Ned advised me to sign up with a class that he facilitates called Partners in Policymaking™. I took the class in 2002, and Annette took it the following year. We learned so much in Partners, and after being so empowered with so much knowledge, we were ready to take on the school district, and to get our child placed in the general classroom with appropriate supports. We knew it wasn't going to be easy and that we would have struggles accomplishing that goal, but we knew we had to try.

When we scheduled our IEP (Individualized Education Plan) team meeting, we invited Ned to attend. However, a schedule conflict prevented him from being there. But through Partners, we had the tools we needed to present our case. We invited another parent advocate to join us for the meeting, because we had learned not to attend these meetings alone.

At that IEP meeting, a decision was made by the team to place Scott in the general education classroom with the proper supports. Scott was in the fourth grade when this decision was made, and it was close to the end of the semester. Annette and I made a choice that wound up being the best decision for our son. We didn't want him placed in the general educational classroom just to prove a point—we wanted him to increase his learning experiences. Therefore, we let him repeat the fourth grade, so he could start the year in the general education class, getting the basic concepts from the beginning.

Scott has been very successful in his placement. About two years ago, Scott was reevaluated by the school's psychologist. She could no longer determine that Scott had a learning disability. She changed his diagnosis

to Developmental Delays, stating that he had overcome it with age, and officially removed him from the special education program. We were excited about that outcome, but also concerned when they removed him from speech and language therapies, since this was the only support he was receiving at the time. However, Scott has proven that he can succeed without support in the general education classroom. He is now a freshman in high school, making A's and B's. We are so very proud of him.

Two years ago, we adopted another son, Norman, who also has a disability. From all we had learned from our experiences with Scott, we were ready to be an advocate for Norman too. Norman was diagnosed with ADHD (Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder) and had been placed in the special education program by his foster parents. As we had done with Scott before, we struggled with the school system in determining the appropriate placement for Norman. Finally, in August of this year, Norman started his first year in the general classroom. He is now a freshman in high school at the same school as his "Big Brother" Scott.

One of the most important lessons we've learned as advocates is that, if our sons were exceptional, we had to become exceptional parents. We couldn't wait on the school system to do everything for us because they have their own agenda. We're glad that we were able to help our children before their self-esteem was destroyed by a system that, in our opinion, didn't always make the best choices for our kids.

## BREAKING GROUND READERS' SURVEY RESULTS



Response to this year's *Breaking Ground* Reader Survey was outstanding. A record 37 readers submitted completed surveys by mail and email. Twenty counties were represented from all three Grand Regions. The majority of people who responded were individuals with disabilities or family members (24) but our thanks to everyone who took the time to answer the questions and send the surveys to us. Special thanks to those of you who wrote comments. We will do our best to improve in the areas where you said we could do better.



# Creating Options for Students with Intellectual Disabilities

BY JAN ROSEMERGY "I feel hope in the room," summarized one participant in a May 10, 2007, invitational conference on postsecondary education for students with intellectual disabilities. The day-long conference was attended by a diverse Tennessee audience, ranging from individuals with disabilities, family members, and advocates, to disability service coordinators at Tennessee colleges and universities and State assistant commissioners.

The conference was sponsored by the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities (CDD), the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities, The Arc of Williamson County, the Autism Society of Middle Tennessee and the Down Syndrome Association of Middle Tennessee.

## The Challenge

"Public schools are responsible for educating students with disabilities through age 21," said Wanda Willis, CDD director. "Unfortunately, once students exit school, choices often are limited. Like their typical peers, they are young adults who want to leave home, live with friends, get a good job—and go to college so that they'll be prepared for a better future."

Although students with disabilities are served by Tennessee's public and private colleges and universities, none have programs designed for students with intellectual disabilities. The goal of the conference was to learn how other states have created such programs and to begin planning for Tennessee programs.

## Model Four-Year College Program

The National Down Syndrome Society (NDSS) leads a Transition and Postsecondary Initiative, which was described by Stephanie Smith Lee, senior policy advisor, National Policy Center, National Down Syndrome Society, and former director of the Office of Special Education, U.S. Department of Education. The Initiative promotes funding for research and technical assistance and outreach to model demonstration programs.

Thanks to a generous grant from Laura and Steve Riggio, CEO of Barnes and Noble, the NDSS Initiative was able to support model demonstration programs at both a four-year and a two-year New Jersey college.

Ms. Lee described the four-year Career and Community Studies Program (CCS) at the College of New Jersey as "a college-based, liberal studies program designed to prepare students for adult life through academic rigor, career discovery and preparation, and peer socialization."

Ms. Lee indicated that the CCS program is designed for "students with significant limitations both in intellectual functioning and in adaptive behavior, whose disability impacts their ability to access a general education curriculum, thereby dictating a program focusing on the development of career, community participation and lifelong liberal learning. These are young adults who require a strong system of supports and services."

In addition to being 18–25 years of age and a New Jersey resident, admission criteria include evidence of student independence, motivation, and stability, a desire to continue one's education and the ability to benefit from a college-based program. "Motivation is key," Ms. Lee stressed. "Students must want to be there."

Each student has an individualized plan. Course work includes liberal studies and studies related to vocation, independent life, and socialization and leisure. A critical component has been students having social and academic peer mentors, which at the same time provides peers with valuable experience in teaching and in other service fields like social work or human and organizational development. "It's not been difficult to find peer mentors," Ms. Lee said, "because they feel a lot of personal gain."

Students develop portfolios, which are evaluated, and hold vocational internships on and off campus. The four-year program leads to a certificate in Career and Community Studies. Ms. Lee also described the National Down Syndrome Society's partnership in South Carolina, where a task force of individuals with disabilities, family members, educators and state agency administrators are in the process of developing an inclusive postsecondary program at a two- or four-year college or university in that state.

## Model Two-Year College Program

The DREAM Program—Developing Real Expectations for Achieving Mastery—at Mercer County Community College in New Jersey, was described by Kelly Borden-Joye, educational specialist at Mercer. "DREAM's goal is to address the development of academic skills, career exploration, social relationships and independent living skills to enhance success in community and family life," Ms. Borden-Joye said.

The application process includes a motivational grid, classroom visit and tour, writing sample, meeting mentors, interview, and discussion with parents and an Advisory Board.

Each student's schedule is based on student-centered planning designed to meet his or her needs and aspirations. The planning includes assessment, analysis of prior experience and goal identification.

CONTINUED NEXT PAGE→

## HERE IS A LOOK AT THE RESPONSES TO ALL OF THE QUESTIONS.

Is the newsletter readable (inviting, easy to read) and clearly written and edited? **Excellent 29** / Good 8 / Fair 0 / Poor 0 /

Do you like the way the newsletter looks?  
**Excellent 28** / Good 8 / Fair 1 / Poor 0

In your opinion, what is the MOST valuable type of information we publish? Reports on disability conferences 4 / **Personal success stories 17** / Reports on projects and programs 5 / Resource information 9 / Other 1

CONTINUED →

→ CONTINUED FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

Each student is enrolled in one foundations content course (reading, math, writing) and in an elective for either credit or audit. Elective courses taken by DREAM students this year included sociology, chorus, personal fitness, dance, computer keyboarding, Latin, public speaking, culinary arts, art and computer graphics. All DREAM students take, each for one credit, the College Success Seminar and Introduction to Career Planning.

Peer mentors, who are an integral part of the DREAM program, receive ongoing training, support and supervision from DREAM staff. DREAM began in Fall 2006 and 100% of the DREAM students returned for the Spring 2007 term.

### National Lessons Learned

"Postsecondary education programs for students with intellectual disabilities are a transition experience between high school and real life," said Meg Grigal, senior research associate at TransCen, Inc., whose mission is improving educational and employment outcomes for people with disabilities. "We're building a bridge. It's not just about access to college. It's access to lifelong learning."

Ms. Grigal indicated that the Thinkcollege.net database lists 105 programs for postsecondary education in 30 states, 45% at two-year colleges, and 55% at four-year colleges. There is no federal entity that collects data on programs or practices, and she stressed the need for research.

Program issues that Ms. Grigal identified included poorly defined program goals, lack of student involvement in planning and monitoring of activities, too much time on job training and too little time on real employment, insufficient connection to real life outcomes and employment, and lack of program/service evaluation.

A program goal that Ms. Grigal strongly endorses is that a student will learn to articulate their support needs in employment settings, college classrooms, community settings and at home. "This is huge," Ms. Grigal said.

She emphasized that students should set personal goals that are truly their own. "The dignity of risk is what allows growth." Ms. Grigal also advised thinking beyond college classes. "Consider community learning options—YMCA, Parks and Recreation, everything from Michaels to Home Depot. We need to ensure that students know what options are available in their community and how to access them." She stressed employment and indicated that, for youth with disabilities, research shows that work experience during high school helps them get jobs at higher wages after they graduate. "Job training is not enough," said Ms. Grigal. "They need actual jobs. 'Pre' means never. Just do it. Moreover, the transition to employment is easier than the transition between employment."

Finally, she emphasized the need for postsecondary programs to collect meaningful evaluation data as a part of daily operations and to collect it in a way that can be shared. "Data is empowering," she said.

"Research is certainly needed," agreed Elisabeth Dykens, co-director of the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities, "and this is one of several ways that we hope we can contribute, in Tennessee and nationally."

### Tennessee Student Perspectives

The conference audience heard first-hand the dreams of a panel of Tennessee students with intellectual disabilities. Panelists were middle-school student, Jason Coston, high-school student, Matt Moore, and community-college student, Chrissy Bilante.

"I live with my mom and dad, cats and dogs," Ms. Bilante said. "I've taken courses in history, science, life skills, English and keyboarding." A student at Columbia Community College, she described an art class where she saw work by "famous artists, paintings that were beautiful. I got As on tests. It was hard work." She loves to travel and is going to Italy next. "I pay for my own ticket."

Mr. Moore said, "I live with my mom, dad, and sister, Katie. I love high school. I have lots of friends there. I take many classes. My favorites are art and science. I also work in the cooking school at my school. I have baked cookies and sell them to my friends at break time." Planning his future, Mr. Moore said, "I will graduate in two years. When I graduate I want to go to college in Nashville and get a good job. I do not want to live with mom or dad. I want to live with my friends."

Mr. Coston, in middle school, likes social studies but is "having problems with math right now," which his dad is helping him with. "I want to go to Vanderbilt. And live in a dorm." He dreams of being a musician.

These are just three among the multitude of Tennessee students with intellectual disabilities who have the same hopes and dreams as most high school graduates. They are looking toward a future in which Tennessee will offer them choices for postsecondary education.

### Next Steps

The Organizing Committee, made up of representatives of each of the sponsoring organizations, will continue to meet with the goal of initiating Tennessee postsecondary programs for students with intellectual disabilities.

*Jan Rosemergy is director of Communications and Dissemination at the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center.*

Strongly Agree ☐ / Agree ☐ / Neither Agree nor Disagree ☐ / Disagree ☐ / Strongly Disagree ☐

### READER SURVEY RESPONSES → CONTINUED

In your opinion, what is the LEAST valuable type of information we publish? **Reports on disability conferences 7 /**

Personal success stories 1 / Reports on projects and programs 1 / Resource information 0 / Other 2

*Breaking Ground promotes self-determination and community participation for individuals with developmental disabilities.*

**Strongly Agree 28 / Agree 9 / Neither Agree nor Disagree 0 / Disagree 0 / Strongly Disagree 0**

Postsecondary Education

—SUGGESTED RESOURCES—

Gathered by COURTNEY EVANS TAYLOR

### Web Resources

[www.thinkcollege.net](http://www.thinkcollege.net)

This Web site provides information and links to anyone interested in finding out more about postsecondary education.

[www.communityinclusion.org/pdf/rp45.pdf](http://www.communityinclusion.org/pdf/rp45.pdf)

A product of the Institute for Community Inclusion, this August 2006 issue of the *Research to Practice* newsletter explores the topic of postsecondary education options for students with intellectual disabilities.

[www.heath.gwu.edu](http://www.heath.gwu.edu)

The National Clearinghouse on Postsecondary Education for Persons with Disabilities is supported by the U.S. Department of Education. This Web site has information about educational support services, policies, procedures, adaptations, and opportunities at American campuses, vocational-technical schools and other postsecondary training entities.

[www.ncset.hawaii.edu](http://www.ncset.hawaii.edu)

The Postoutcomes Network of the National Center on Secondary Education and Transition is a collaborative effort of the National Center on Secondary Education and Transition at the University of Minnesota and the Center on Disability Studies at the University of Hawaii. This Web site is dedicated to the products and activities of the Post-School Outcomes/Results Technical Assistance Network.

[www.ncset.org/teleconferences/transcripts/2004\\_03.asp](http://www.ncset.org/teleconferences/transcripts/2004_03.asp)

This is a transcript of the National Center on Secondary Education and Transition teleconference program, "Supporting Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities to Transition and Participate in Postsecondary Education," held March 16, 2004. Presenters included Robert Stodden, Ph.D., director, National Center for the Study of Postsecondary Educational Supports, University of Hawaii at Manoa; Meg Grigal, Ph.D., director, On Campus Outreach, University of Maryland; and Debra Hart, M.Ed., coordinator, School and Community Projects, Institute for Community Inclusion, University of Massachusetts at Boston.

[www.ndss.org](http://www.ndss.org)

The National Down Syndrome Society is working to expand postsecondary education opportunities for students with Down syndrome by helping to replicate New Jersey programs elsewhere. From the NDSS homepage, see "Information Topics," then "Educational and Schooling," then "Postsecondary."

[www.transitiontocollege.net](http://www.transitiontocollege.net)

This Web site is sponsored by the Postsecondary Education Research Center Project, which is coordinated by TransCen, Inc. It includes links to Internet resources, answers to frequently asked questions related to developing or expanding services for students with intellectual disabilities in college settings, and specific information on two project sites in Maryland and Connecticut.

[www.stepsforward.homestead.com/index.html](http://www.stepsforward.homestead.com/index.html)

The STEPS Forward Inclusive Post Secondary Education Society was incorporated in 2001 by a group of parents concerned that there was no place in society for children with intellectual disabilities as they reached adulthood—no place for lifelong education, no place for employment, no place to participate as citizens. STEPS's mandate is to transform postsecondary education in the province of British Columbia by modeling inclusion for students with intellectual disabilities, starting at UBC (STEPS-Campus) and eventually expanding to other colleges and universities.

### Books

*Going to College: Expanding Opportunities for People with Disabilities* — E. E. Getzel & P. Wehman, Editors (2005)

[www.brookespublishing.com](http://www.brookespublishing.com)

*Transition Services for Students with Significant Disabilities in College and Community Settings: Strategies for Planning, Implementation, and Evaluation* — M. Grigal, D. A., Neubert and M. S. Moon (2005)

[www.proedinc.com](http://www.proedinc.com)

### Film

*Through the Same Door—A Film by Paul Rossen*

Winner of the 2006 TASH Image Award for the Positive Portrayal of People with Disabilities, this 25-minute DVD tells the story of Micah Fialka-Feldman, a college student with a cognitive disability.

[www.throughthesamedoor.com](http://www.throughthesamedoor.com)

*Courtney Evans Taylor is associate director of Communications and Dissemination at the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center.*

*Breaking Ground* improves the ability of individuals with developmental disabilities and family members to make choices and exert control over the services and supports they use.

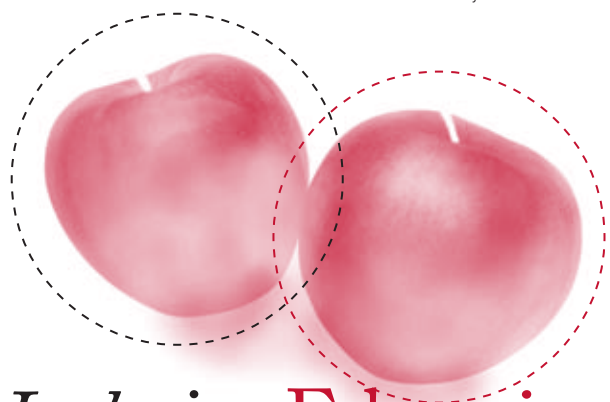
Strongly Agree 16 / Agree 17 / Neither Agree nor Disagree 3 / Disagree 0 / Strongly Disagree 0

*Breaking Ground* improves the ability of individuals with developmental disabilities and family members to participate in

community life. Strongly Agree 19 / Agree 15 / Neither Agree nor Disagree 3 / Disagree 0 / Strongly Disagree 0

Which category best describes you? Person with a disability or family member of a person with a disability 24 / Direct care provider or other disability-related service provider 5 / Educator 2 / Non-elected government employee 4 / Elected government official or representative of elected government official 2 / Other 0

Photo by Roswitha Schacht



# Inclusive Education

BY HOLLY LU CONANT REES

Ask a group of individuals involved in the education of

students with disabilities about *inclusion* and the responses will be not only diverse but, on occasion, self-contradictory: *full inclusion*, *inclusion kids*, even the *inclusion room*. Practices described as *inclusion* cover an equally broad span:

- + Four-year-olds with disabilities in a segregated classroom in the same *building* as typical kids;
- + the infamous “specials” of inclusion for art, music and physical education (sort of the meat ‘n’ three approach);
- + a “velcro’ed” education assistant; or
- + team-teaching by a general education teacher and a resource teacher.

The terminology has evolved over the years from *mainstreaming* to *integration* to *inclusion*, and, most recently, to *inclusive education*. Through these shifts in language, the law which governs special education, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), has consistently used a less catchy but still powerful phrase, *Least Restrictive Environment*, or *LRE*. The word “inclusion” does not appear in IDEA. Nonetheless, the law has a clear, emphatic bias towards educating students with disabilities alongside their typical peers. IDEA states:

Unless a student’s IEP [Individualized Education Plan] requires some other option, the student is educated in the school and the classroom s/he would have attended if s/he did not have a disability.

Separate schooling or the removal of children with disabilities from regular education environments *occurs only* when the nature or severity of the disability...is such that education in regular education classes with the *use of supplementary aids and services* cannot be satisfactorily achieved. [Emphasis added.]

Several years ago, the Disability Coalition on Education (DCE) conducted an informal survey to learn about families’ experiences of inclusion in Tennessee. The sample was skewed, perhaps, towards families who were atypically knowledgeable about the educational process, but DCE believed that the collection of even anecdotal information about inclusive practices was worthwhile.

An open-ended “concerns” section indicated that families have passionate beliefs about inclusion, usually positive, but sometimes intensely negative, particularly when inclusion is poorly implemented. Attitudes and school culture are key factors for success. Families frequently encounter resistance to their expectation that their children will be educated with typical peers, especially with preschool students or students with intellectual disabilities. Even in theoretically inclusive placements, appropriate supports and training may not be provided.

*“This county won’t practice inclusion the way I keep being trained in it.”*

*“Without better training...for regular ed teachers, I don’t want my child in their class.”*

*“Site-based management is a problem.”*

*“They hate it [inclusion] and will do anything to avoid it.”*

Perhaps the most striking and distressing finding was that nearly every parent whose student was included for most or all of the day, noted that their child was the exception, and that other students in their school were in segregated classrooms. Numerous families referred to a struggle/fight/battle, and to obstacles in learning about their rights and options.

Team-teaching, while a recognized strategy building on the strengths of both general and special educators, appears to be a rare practice in Tennessee. Educational Assistants (EA) can be a vital component of a student’s program, when the EA serves as a support to the classroom

## TENNESSEE EDUCATION ASSOCIATION STUDIES *INCLUSION* from the TEACHER’S PERSPECTIVE

BY SUSAN DALTON

The Tennessee Education Association (TEA) has been involved in special education

policy efforts for many years. In 2005, the elected delegates at the annual Representative Assembly voted to study inclusion efforts statewide because of the effect on every member. Delegates reported that some districts undermined multidisciplinary team decisions and strained working relationships with parents due to one-size-fits all placement decisions. Others described programs that seemingly fell outside of appropriate inclusion practices.

In their call to action, concern also was expressed that the highly qualified requirements under No Child Left Behind (NCLB) placed some special education teachers in subservient positions to general education teachers through administrative policies. This was viewed as damaging to the teaching profession as a whole, and especially harmful to the field of special education.

At the direction of the delegates, TEA president, Judy Beasley-Whitehill, appointed 16 practitioners, representative of all regions and from both general education and special education, to serve on an ad hoc committee. This committee, along with two staff liaisons, developed an on-line survey which was available to all TEA members in the winter of 2006.

Members anonymously answered 25 questions on demographic information, current practices, local policy and teacher training. Over one-third of respondents took the opportunity to write personal comments, which were much more insightful than the analysis of the survey questions.

Both positive and negative viewpoints were expressed concerning inclusive practices. Some members responded that they were uncomfortable with the survey since there was no standard definition of the term “inclusion”. The committee had already grappled with the



and as a facilitator for peer interaction, rather than as a glued-on adult. Training and supports for general education teachers are lacking, with several comments that their student's special education teacher didn't understand inclusive education.

Even given the challenges of resistant systems, inadequate supports and training and dramatic inconsistency, not only across the State but within schools, families gave powerful testimony about the value of inclusive education. Families also were quick to give credit to the dedicated educators who have contributed to their student's success.

*"The students in his classes have always been very supportive of Evan, and they delight in his successes...He has learned a great deal about appropriate behavior and communication from his typical peers that he would not have an opportunity to learn in a segregated setting."*

*"It's important to me that his peers (future co-workers and employers) see that 'Kids Like Danny' are capable of doing real meaningful activity."*

*"Rachel's presence in our class taught us all that even though we are all different, we can still be friends and learn from our differences."*

*"If you teach a child acceptance, they will accept as an adult."*

*"The issue of inclusion is one of respect."*

Following the survey, DCE developed a position statement on inclusive education. The change in terminology was deliberate, based on the belief that inclusion should not be an exception, a distinct activity or a special circumstance. The principle that all students belong is just one attribute of quality education.

**Disability Coalition on Education** is a family-driven, statewide network of families, educators, advocacy organizations and agencies working collaboratively to improve education systems in Tennessee.

**For more information about DCE** or to be added to the DCE's listserv, please contact Holly Lu Conant Rees, at hlu1055@comcast.net.

*Holly Lu Conant Rees is a parent and a long-time advocate for students with disabilities.*

### Why inclusive education?

#### because it's the law ... because it works

"Regardless of the type of disability...special needs students educated in regular classrooms do better academically and socially."

#### because it's the right thing to do....

- + considering each person as a valued member of the school community
- + creating a climate of acceptance and belonging
- + respecting and welcoming diversity

### Inclusive education requires

- + Visionary leadership
- + Staff development
- + Collaboration
- + Flexible scheduling
- + Strength and learning-style based assessment
- + Quality instructional practices
- + Coordinated team planning
- + Participatory decision-making
- + Ongoing administrative support
- + Creativity, patience and humor

### Inclusive education

- + means providing to all students, *including those with significant disabilities*:
- + quality education;
- + opportunities for involvement in all aspects of school life;
- + all needed aids, supports, services and specially designed instruction:
  - > in typical school settings
  - > in age-appropriate classes
  - > with peers who do not have disabilities
  - > in order to prepare all students for productive lives as citizens...

...which, after all, is the ultimate goal of education for every student.

terminology dilemma in the survey construction, but decided that this work was sanctioned as a beginning point for such discussions.

Almost 85 percent of respondents felt that administrators are generally supportive of inclusive practices. When asked about parent satisfaction, 70 percent responded that parents were satisfied with the level of inclusive services. A lack of professional development opportunities and the need for collaborative planning were cited as areas of major concern.

While almost 15 percent reported that inclusion had not worked well in their classrooms or school settings, most cited specific ways to improve the success rate. The ratio of general education students/students with disabilities was cited most often as the primary concern. Although the State Board of Education requires each local district to work toward an equitable distribution of students with disabilities, about 30 percent responded that service delivery overloads compromised IEP (Individualized Education Plan) fulfillment.

Teachers with more reasonable ratios of general ed students/students with disabilities were much more positive in their comments. Teachers who identified their grade level(s) as elementary were slightly more positive in their comments than were secondary school teachers. There were numerous reports of secondary inclusion classes with well over half of the students having disabilities, and several identified block scheduling as an obstacle to good inclusive practices.

Others responded that their successful classroom experiences depended on having shared planning between the general and special educators. They strongly felt that the instructional team should have time to collaborate on modifications, IEP objectives, materials and instructional strategies, classroom management and lesson planning. These were "musts", in addition to shared professional development opportunities targeted at inclusive strategies. Several general education

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teachers noted that they made a conscious decision not to pursue the field of special education and that they were highly uncomfortable with the changing roles inherent in inclusion assignments.

With regard to NCLB, 40 percent believed that increasing the amount of time in the general education setting would be one way to “close the achievement gap” for students with disabilities. Of the total responses, only six percent expressed fear that districts were using a one-size-fits-all approach. Many of these comments came from special education teachers who felt that their system sacrificed student needs for the satisfaction of standardized test preparation or the highly qualified mandates of NCLB. Although the total number of such comments was relatively low, it is possible that a considerable number of students are affected by such an approach.

In addition to expressing the need for more collaboration in shared teaching, many respondents said that inclusion experiences would be more positive if resources were available for success. They mentioned textbooks for students and teachers, appropriate classroom space, extra desks and supplies for all members of the teaching team, additional education support professionals, sufficient funding and appropriate professional development or college coursework. Almost 56 percent felt that additional coursework in special education would have better prepared them to teach their students with disabilities. Very few educators reported having any formal training in inclusive teaching strategies.

Several educators specifically mentioned challenging situations involving students classified as emotionally disturbed, or situations where the general education students had been frightened or academically disadvantaged because of inclusion placements. Some felt that their district was “doing” inclusion in name only in order to look good on paper. Others expressed gratitude for the opportunity to be reflective and honest about inclusion via an anonymous survey.

In May of 2006, the TEA Board approved a comprehensive position statement on inclusion which has been shared with members. In addition, the study appears to have served as a catalyst for increased networking and collaborative conversations about inclusive education. Since completion of the study, the instructional division of TEA has seen an increase in special education-related questions, which suggests that members feel encouraged to seek additional help through their State association. As a direct result of the study, TEA staff members have developed two new professional development opportunities. Both workshops are designed to help practitioners and teaching teams gain the skills necessary for effective shared teaching.

The work on inclusion is not complete, and the TEA study should be viewed as merely a beginning. Perhaps the reauthorization of NCLB and future reauthorizations of IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) will provide some legal guidance, but waiting on a federal rescue is not sound educational policy. If Tennessee seeks to move beyond the random districts and classrooms that currently model excellence in inclusive practices, there is much collaboration and educational research yet to be done.

*Susan Dalton is a staff member of the Instruction & Professional Development Division of the Tennessee Education Association.*

Brandi Peters

Photos by Project Opportunity Staff



## TRANSITION: A PROCESS, NOT AN EVENT

BY SARA EZELL

When I began working in the field of Special Education, I worked with preschool children with disabilities in inclusive settings. For us, “transitioning” meant helping the children get from snack time to free play without causing too much of a disruption in their attention or mood. Thus, a transition had a beginning, a middle and an end—hopefully a good one! And judging the success of the transition was easy: when everyone was engaged in the next activity, the transition had worked.

However, now that I have the privilege of overseeing a high-school-to-work transition program called Project Opportunity, I view the concept of a “transition” in a much different way. It is no longer simply a way to get from one activity to another, and judging its success is quite complicated. The goal is relatively the same, but it is more of a process than a discrete event. Transitions that lasted 3–5 minutes in the preschool classroom last 3–5 months in a young adult’s life—or even longer.

Project Opportunity is funded by the Tennessee Division of Rehabilitation Services, the Division of Special Education and the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities. We have conducted job training/transition services for high school seniors with developmental disabilities in Davidson and surrounding counties for two years. Out of the 15 individuals who graduated from our program initially, 12 were placed into regular positions at Vanderbilt Medical Center. As of this writing, seven are still employed, with three actively looking for placement. Thus, the process of FINDING a job is very different than the process of KEEPING a job.

Why are transitions from school to work so difficult? Because there are so many factors involved in making the transition successful, many of which cannot be controlled, such as health issues and organizational changes (i.e., change in work duties, job eliminations, etc.). However, there are three complicating factors that, if considered part of the transition process, can positively

(or negatively) affect the success of that transition. These are strictly anecdotal from our experience at Project Opportunity, but are probably similar among other programs like ours. The most important thing is that these factors can be addressed by families, advocates and worksites, in collaboration, to create smoother transitions.

### Family Needs

I was under the assumption (which is clearly wrong, as I now see!) that when I worked with young adults with disabilities, the impact of the family role would not be the same as it is in young childhood. What I was forgetting (forgive me graduate school professors) was the importance of the family or support systems during the lifespan, not just childhood. Thus, as we found placements for our student graduates, we needed to consider the effect of the job on the family and the system of supports currently in place for the student.

For instance, if an individual with a disability lives at home with his/her parents, a job will inevitably affect the family. The hours may be different than school or the transportation needs must change. However, if the goal is to place an individual in an existing job (i.e., not job carving or job creation), how can we make this work?

...the process of **FINDING** a job is very different than the process of **KEEPING** a job.

The answer is careful planning and taking a team approach. Just as a team planned the educational supports needed for a child, so must a team plan the employment supports for a young adult. Identifying the constraints on the family (other siblings needing care, work schedules of the parents, issues in the home, etc.) is the first step in planning. Bringing all of the concerns to the table ensures that either only certain jobs will be identified or (my personal favorite) we can identify other transitions that need to occur to secure employment, such as living independently or accessing community transportation. Many times, there are multiple transitions that need to occur simultaneously, but none of that can happen without parent support.

### Student vs. Employee Role

When transitioning from school to work, the expectations of the individual change drastically. This has been a challenge for most of our students. As students, they're used to having Spring Break, Fall Break, inservice days, etc. As employees, that's one of the rudest awakenings you can have: not only does Spring Break not exist but you must get permission to take even one day off! Some of our families have had to adjust to the lack of family vacations or taking a long weekend as their son or daughter must report to work every day of their probationary period.

Other than attendance, another key shift in roles is the consistent expectations of high performance. This doesn't mean that as an employee we are all expected to be perfect. However, there is an expectation that a business need will be filled by the employee, not just affecting the individual but affecting the entire worksite. For example, if a student does not complete an assignment accurately

or in a timely manner, the consequences affect the student. If an employee does not perform to the expectation of the supervisor, the consequences not only affect the employee, but coworkers as well.

This is a key shift for our students with disabilities. Often, we discover that, as students, there were few, or lower, expectations placed on them for assignments or behavior. Thus part of the transition process is raising expectations slowly to prepare them for the workplace.

This role shift from student to employee can be addressed in the home. We often find that our participants are able (and willing) to do much more while at our program than they do at home, mostly due to higher expectations. Giving more responsibility at home and having higher expectations for behavior are keys to facilitating the transition from student to employee.



Travis Coleman

### Perception of Others

The final factor that affects successful transition is the perception of coworkers, supervisors and employers with respect to hiring a person with a disability. As a person with a disability myself, I am continually surprised at how far we have come in this area but equally surprised about how much further we have to go. Individuals with disabilities can participate in making changes in perceptions by learning to advocate for themselves, by maintaining positive self-images and by striving to reach their full potential whether at school or in the workplace.

At Project Opportunity, we welcome open dialogues with departments about their fears or concerns, and conduct training for departments who will be hiring our interns. The best way to address misperceptions, in my opinion, is to increase the opportunities for interaction between individuals with and without disabilities. Supervisors who have had experience with individuals with disabilities are likely to influence others' perceptions; thus programs like ours that provide such experience will influence future opportunities as well.

*Sara Ezell is program coordinator for Project Opportunity.*



YLF  
2007

# High School Students GET *a TASTE of* COLLEGE at ANNUAL FORUM

BY NED ANDREW SOLOMON

Sure, some of them complained about the cafeteria food, or the size of their dorm rooms. A few wished there was more "down time" between presentations, workshops and discussion groups. Most of them hated getting dragged out of bed for a seven a.m. breakfast.

Which would—perhaps—make them more like, than unlike, any college students. That's the idea behind the Tennessee Youth Leadership Forum. Take a bunch of high school students with disabilities from across the State and set them in the middle of a college campus, so they can be actively thinking about what their lives will look like after graduation.

Of course, not all of these students are college bound, again, just like their typical peers. They may be job-bound, or focusing on how they'll live on their own once they depart from their parents' domains. At the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities,

the hopes are simple, but the expectations are high. We hope that these students are thinking about life after high school, and that they'll try to make themselves "heard" in regard to the decisions that will affect them most directly. We expect them to do great things in their communities. That they'll get involved in activities, serve on committees, volunteer, apply for and get meaningful jobs, educate themselves and others, and that they'll be as independent as they can be. And when they need support in accomplishing something, they'll ask for it.

The 2007 Youth Leadership Forum, held in early July on the Vanderbilt University campus, was a blast. The students clicked beautifully and no one was excluded. At lights out time, they had to be surgically removed from their cohorts. Did they speak up? Sometimes endlessly.

They talked about their lives and their disabilities. They talked about their challenges in school or at home, as well as their successes. They learned about college resources for students with disabilities and how to best communicate with elected officials. They took a ton of pictures during a photography workshop and displayed their unique gifts in a talent show.

They made the volunteer staff and returning YLF graduates very proud.

*For more information about YLF, or to get an application for the 2008 Forum, please contact Ned Andrew Solomon, director, at 615-532-6556, or by e-mail at ned.solomon@state.tn.us.*

## *Here are the 2007 YLF Student Delegates Graduates*



Christian Darnell, La Vergne  
Jarvis Davidson, Knoxville  
Alex Hubbard, Goodlettsville  
Randee Johnson, Hendersonville



Patrick Kelty, Franklin  
Dustin Knoernschild, Andersonville  
Seth Link, Gallatin  
Destiny Montemayor, Hendersonville



Matt Moore, Brentwood  
Jordan Pack, Sevierville  
Sara Quinn, Clarksville  
Anthony Sturdivant, Union City



Kelly Tatum, Hohenwald  
Jacob Tittle, Memphis  
Robin Walker, Henry  
Vicky Wells, Knoxville

Photos by Lynette Swinford





Photos by Ned Andrew Solomon



## PARTNERS IN POLICYMAKING

### CLASS BEGINS

BY NED ANDREW SOLOMON On September 14, the 15th year of Partners in Policymaking™ in Tennessee began. The leadership training program, established

20 years ago by the Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities, brings together individuals with disabilities and family members of persons with disabilities for seven weekend sessions of training, September through April.

Not meant to address a particular disability, the informative sessions cover a wide range of topics geared toward enhancing the Partners' advocacy and self-advocacy skills. Curriculum competencies are taught by local and national experts in the field and include:

- + The history of the disability experience
- + People First Language
- + Best practices in inclusive education
- + Building inclusive communities
- + Self-determination
- + Supported living and home ownership
- + Supported, competitive and self-employment
- + The state and federal legislative processes
- + Conducting effective meetings
- + Working with the media, and other strategies for systems change

Besides attending informative sessions, Partners complete homework assignments, participate in a Mock Legislative Testimony, tour the State Capitol and meet with a legislator. Perhaps the most important component of the program is the attendees' numerous opportunities to network with other persons with disabilities and family members to discuss the challenges and successes they've experienced as they've tried to navigate their communities or pave an easier road for their loved ones.

Join us in welcoming the 2007-08 class:

James Bailes, Harriman  
 Kevin Brown, Bolivar  
 Grace Ann Campbell, Memphis  
 Jeri Carmichael, Murfreesboro  
 Amanda Carter, Knoxville  
 Ashley Coulter, Thompson Station  
 Corinne Derenburger, Collierville  
 William Dockery, Knoxville  
 Dena Gassner, Franklin  
 Jim Harris, Hendersonville  
 Paula Hosmer, Nashville

Leora Jackson, Jackson  
 Nancy Kennedy, Nashville  
 Galina Merkulova, Knoxville  
 Linda Mosley, Arrington  
 Virginia Piper, Chattanooga  
 John Richardson, Smithville  
 Adrian Starks, Memphis  
 Anna Faye Tomlin, Linden  
 Faye Townsend, Memphis  
 Tim Vogus, Nashville  
 Ginger Walton, Collierville

For more information about Tennessee's Partners in Policymaking program or to get an application for the 2008-09 class, please contact Ned Andrew Solomon, director, at 615-532-6556, or by e-mail at ned.solomon@state.tn.us.

(From top) Nancy Kennedy, Tim Vogus, Leora Jackson, James Bailes, Paula Hosmer and Bill Dockery.

**Tennessee Disability Pathfinder has phone, Web, and print resources in English and Spanish to connect the Tennessee disability community with service providers.** Referral services, free of cost, are provided to persons with disabilities, family members, service providers, and advocates. Pathfinder is a joint project of the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities and the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center for Research on Human Development.

## Education-related Events On Pathfinder Calendar

Tennessee Disability Pathfinder maintains the Pathfinder Disability Calendar, an Internet calendar of disability-related events. Organizations post events to this calendar, the most comprehensive listing of Tennessee disability events. The events below are just a sample of the more than 200 events currently listed on the calendar by over 70 individuals from across the State. For more information about these or other events, visit [www.familypathfinder.org](http://www.familypathfinder.org) and click on "Pathfinder Disability Calendar."

Basic Rights—A Parent's Introduction to Special Education  
Individualized Education Program (IEP)  
Preparing for Transition  
Evaluation and Assessments  
Adaptations for Promoting Play at Home & School  
Managing the Differentiated Classroom  
Instructional Strategies  
Inclusion and Least Restrictive Environment  
Supporting Positive Behavior at Home and School  
Working as a Team.  
*And many more!*

If you would like to submit a calendar listing for a conference, training, meeting, or other disability-related event, please contact

Ashley Coulter at [ashley.coulter@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:ashley.coulter@vanderbilt.edu) or 800-640-4636 (ext. 15).

## Resource Spotlight: Tennessee Education Resources

These education-related resources—and more!—can be found on the Pathfinder Web site at [www.familypathfinder.org](http://www.familypathfinder.org).

### *Disability Coalition on Education of Tennessee (DCE)*

A statewide alliance of family members, educators, state and advocacy organizations focused on bringing about positive change in the education of students with and without disabilities. DCE maintains an e-mail list to keep subscribers aware of educational concerns and happenings throughout the State. For more information, or to join, contact DCE at [dce@dce-tn.org](mailto:dce@dce-tn.org).

### *Project LINK—Leaders In Education Networking for Kids*

A program that educates parents of children with disabilities about the special education process so that they may advocate for their own children's education and assist other parents. Through the efforts of three regional coordinators, LINK strives to empower and organize parents to form local parent education groups, which can then be "linked" up with other parent groups and statewide educational initiatives. The project also works toward promoting school systems that are welcoming and include and support all children in general classrooms.

## The REFORM of TENNESSEE'S EARLY INTERVENTION SYSTEM

BY JAMIE KILPATRICK, DIRECTOR

Tennessee's Early Intervention System,

or TEIS, is a program within the Division of Special Education of Tennessee's Department of Education. TEIS serves children from birth to age three and their families, who qualify based upon a percentage of developmental delay or a diagnosed condition within the State's eligibility criteria. TEIS is a voluntary program also known as Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).



Jamie Kilpatrick (left) with TEIS staff.

Photo by Ruth Wiseman

Early intervention programs vary from state to state, but are similar in their quest to provide young children experiencing delays and their families with early developmental support. In 2006, 7718 eligible children and their families statewide chose to participate in TEIS.

In the Spring of 2006, the Department of Education and the Governor's Office of Children's Care Coordination (GOCCC) began a policy analysis of the TEIS and Tennessee Infant Parent Services (TIPS), a program within TEIS. The purpose of this study was to guide Tennessee toward an efficient, effective service system and to provide as many families as possible with quality early intervention services.

The study involved input from the State and local level, including parents, teachers, therapists, parent advisors, service coordinators, Local Interagency Coordinating Council (LICC) members and others. The scope of the analysis was a comprehensive assessment of the service system, administration and financing of early intervention services in Tennessee.

Several factors prompted the analysis, including a steady growth in early intervention spending without a similar increase in the number of families served; the program experienced cost overruns

East Tennessee Coordinator: Mary Ann Schenk, 423-267-0500  
 Middle Tennessee Coordinator: Loria Hubbard-Richardson,  
 615-215-2065  
 West Tennessee Coordinator: Treva Maitland, 731-559-4187

### *Regional Resource Centers*

Established by the Tennessee Department of Education, Division of Special Education, these three centers provide information and guidance to teachers, administrators, parents and others who have or serve children with disabilities. Centers are staffed with educational consultants who provide a variety of services, including technical assistance through management and compliance issues, and training in areas such as early childhood/preschool, secondary transition, behavior and autism services.

East Tennessee Center: 865-594-5691  
 Middle Tennessee Center: 615-532-3258  
 West Tennessee Center: 731-421-5074

### *Support and Training for Exceptional Parents (STEP)*

STEP provides free information, advocacy training, and support services to parents of children eligible to receive special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). STEP services are available to Tennessee residents who are parents or family members of a special education student or a student who may need special help in school (birth through age 22). There is no charge for services to parents. For more information, contact STEP at [information@tnstep.org](mailto:information@tnstep.org) or 800-280-STEP (7837).

### *What You Need to Know About Special Education*

The Legal Aid Society of Middle Tennessee and the Cumberlands publishes this free, easy to read legal help booklet. The 36-page booklet explains "how special education works in schools" and includes sample letters families can use to request testing, mediation or a due process hearing. The booklet is available on the Legal Aid Society's Web site at <http://www.las.org> (click on "Self Help Booklets") or by calling 1-800-238-1443.

### **Stay Connected With Pathfinder**

Pathfinder publishes The Pathfinder, an e-newsletter containing information about program activities and other disability-related resources in Tennessee. Past issues of the publication are archived on the Pathfinder Web site (under Pathfinder Features, click on "The Pathfinder: News from Tennessee Disability Pathfinder"). To receive future news from Tennessee Disability Pathfinder via e-mail, please contact us at [tnpathfinder@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:tnpathfinder@vanderbilt.edu).

### **For Further Information**

Tennessee Disability Pathfinder  
 (615) 322-8529 (Nashville area, English & Español)  
 (800) 640-4636 (toll-free, English & Español)  
 (615) 321-8834 (fax)  
 TTY/TDD users: please dial 711 for free relay service  
[www.familypathfinder.org](http://www.familypathfinder.org)  
[tnpathfinder@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:tnpathfinder@vanderbilt.edu)

*Melissa Fortson is information & referral specialist/program coordinator with Tennessee Disability Pathfinder.*

in three consecutive fiscal years. Another factor was that the option became available in the federal law to extend services up to age five for children who are eligible for Part B of IDEA, however, without additional federal resources.

Additionally, significant local differences in the administration of programs and implementation of services created many inequities across the State, causing major differences in eligibility determination procedures as well as differences in the services provided. There also was a recognized need to find and serve more children. Lastly, it is a policy of the Administration to manage State government effectively and efficiently. These programs did not meet those criteria. Each of these factors contributed to the timeliness of the Analysis.

The findings were evaluated and several recommendations were made, including streamlining the eligibility determination process, strengthening service coordination, and developing and implementing functional Individualized Family Service Plans (IFSPs). Also recommended was to unify TEIS, TIPS, and other early intervention resources through reorganization of State and District level administrations.

The group also suggested exploring the development of Tennessee early intervention services for families whose children would not be eligible for special education services at age three. Currently, TEIS

services are no longer available to them and these children must await entry into Pre-K programs. The Department believes that 1,200 children annually are in need of this State defined program. The final recommendation was to implement other fund expansion opportunities to benefit Tennessee's children with disabilities and their families. This will be accomplished through initiated public and private partnerships.

The Reform of Tennessee's Early Intervention System is currently underway. State and District level staff have been hired to implement and research the recommendations presented by the Analysis. Some of the offices will be relocating to accommodate a larger staff due to the unification of the former TEIS and TIPS programs into the new State Point of Entry Offices for TEIS.

Early intervention is crucial to providing a good education to children with disabilities. Families with concerns about their children's development or would like more information about TEIS may call 1-800-852-7157.

*Jamie Kilpatrick is a Paris, Tennessee native. He has served in the TEIS system for 10 years in various capacities. He currently lives in Dickson County with his wife, Amy, and his three children, Houston, Elizabeth, and Madeline, all age five.*

Photo by Lindsey Lissau



Well-wishers attend RIP ribbon cutting ceremony.

## RIP PROGRAM OPENS *in* MEMPHIS

BY ROBIN WELSH STEVENS

A new Regional Intervention Program (RIP) was launched in the Spring of 2007 by the University of Memphis (U of M) and the Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities. Dr. Kathleen Cooter, a faculty member of the University, supervises the grant.

RIP is a parenting program that aids preschoolers and their families by teaching behavior management and discipline skills. The program serves families with children under the age of six who have mild to severe behavior problems, including aggression, tantrums, separation anxiety, and bedtime issues. RIP was established in 1969, and there are currently 13 RIP programs across the State.

Families attend two-hour sessions twice a week. RIP's most important component is parent implementation. This means that parents learn to work with their own children, support one another and operate the program. Parents learn by repeated direct practice followed by supportive feedback.

Services that RIP offers include:

- + Beginning behavior management training in areas such as identifying problem behaviors, child development and positive discipline strategies.
- + Advanced behavior management training in all of the above areas as parents help teach skills to newer parents in the program.
- + Classroom programs to teach children behaviors that will help them be successful in school and childcare settings.
- + Social skills training to teach children strategies to get along together.
- + Childcare and preschool intervention that may include consultation with teachers about problems at school.
- + Follow-up services for families who complete the program may include help in finding school and childcare programs and consultation about problems at home and school.

Participants typically stay in the program for six to eight months. There is no charge for families to be enrolled in the program. Adults repay RIP by volunteering to train and support new families who join the program, while reinforcing what they have learned. Currently, there is a waiting list for the program.

A ribbon-cutting ceremony for the Memphis RIP was held on March 26, 2007. The program is located in a renovated area of a building on the Park Avenue campus at the U of M. The building houses several programs dedicated to early intervention, including TEIS (Tennessee Early Intervention Services), Project Memphis and Project RISE (Restructuring for Inclusive School Environments). Some U of M Special Education classes also meet in the same building.

Serving as the project coordinator for Memphis, I received training at the Nashville RIP site last Fall. My background includes 10 years experience in early intervention and five years as a teacher with Memphis City Schools. Our two new staff members—Carolyn Quinn and Morgan Spohn—have received training at the Nashville and Columbia RIP sites. Both have experience working with children and families dealing with issues related to behavior.

*The University of Memphis site is the first in a university setting. For more information please contact:*



*Robin W. Stevens, Program Director  
Regional Intervention Program  
University of Memphis, South Campus  
Building 48, Suite 110  
4111 South MSU B Street  
Memphis, Tennessee 38152  
Phone 901-678-5258  
Fax 901-678-5230  
rwelsh@memphis.edu*

*For more info about the national RIP Program, visit [www.ripnetwork.org](http://www.ripnetwork.org)*



## A MEETING *of the* MINDS: EDUCATORS *and* PARENTS COLLABORATE *in* EAST TENNESSEE

BY NED ANDREW SOLOMON

Some folks choose to fight the system; others choose to work within it to make a positive change. Traditionally, for children with disabilities in the school system, there has been a conflict between the family's desire for their child to be fully included and have everything needed to succeed in an educational setting, and the school's limitations in terms of budget, resources, awareness or expertise about different disabilities, and, in some cases, willingness to adapt or think outside of "what's been done before".

Armed with legislative mandates like the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) or No Child Left Behind (NCLB), some parents are willing to go to court to get what they feel their kids legally deserve. That road may lead to change, but it can be long, hard and expensive—both in dollars and the loss of future collaborative relationships with teachers and administrators.

The LINK (Leaders In Education Networking for Kids) Project, coordinated by The Arc of Tennessee and funded through a grant from the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities and the Division of Special Education, has switched gears in recent years. First created as a training initiative for parents to learn their rights to better advocate for their children, and to help them "link" up with other parents in their local areas and cohorts across the State, the project's primary focus now is to help parents and educators "link" together. The hope is that both sides will see each other's points of view, and come to win-win decisions through enhanced communication and conflict resolution strategies.

**The hope is that both sides will see each other's points of view, and come to win-win decisions through enhanced communication and conflict resolution strategies.**

Two parents in East Tennessee, Pam Huber and Paige Nichols, both associated with the LINK Project, have taken this mission to heart. These moms have sought to improve their own children's path through their school years, as well as make the road easier for their children's peers and those who will sit in their desks in the future.

Ms. Huber's main objective was to keep her child in a stable setting, near home. "We were advocating for our kids to be located where all the other kids are, and not to have to move them around every year," says Ms. Huber, chair of the Sullivan County LINK group. "We saw power in numbers, by getting parents together to address this issue."

Ms. Huber took the process one step further. She actually reached out to the special education director and teachers in her school district, inviting them to attend the meetings with the parents. "And then vice versa," says Ms. Huber, "we've been invited to attend their administration meetings. It's all about getting to know each other, and building relationships."

It helps that Ms. Huber's LINK group—established with lots of encouragement by LINK's East Tennessee Coordinator, Mary Ann Shenk—has a "no whining" rule. "We meet at a coffee shop and have an agenda," says Ms. Huber. "We talk about problems and solutions. And we understand that teachers have issues too. So I'm always thinking, how can we help them do their job?"

Since school is just one part of her child's experience, Ms. Huber also worked to break down barriers in other areas. She helped get a more inclusive YMCA program started by accessing a \$1200 grant to buy some adaptive recreational equipment. She advocated successfully for getting an elevator put in a local library. Now kids and adults in wheelchairs have total access to the building.

In Hamblen County, Ms. Nichols has supported her local libraries in a different way. "We donated \$1000 to two different libraries," says Ms. Nichols. "That money helped them buy books about disabilities."

Ms. Nichols oversees a LINK group that has been in existence for four years. In fact, her group has established itself as a non-profit organization called Hand in Hand Family Support. "We have 32 families in our group from several counties," says Ms. Nichols. "And we have meetings with different topics every month, like transitioning, potty training and nutrition."

The non-profit also runs a bi-weekly meeting specific to issues of Down syndrome and a monthly meeting for autism issues. Like Ms. Huber's group, teachers also are invited to the Hand in Hand meetings, which helps create an environment of listening and understanding on both sides of the aisle.

Both Ms. Nichols and Ms. Huber have learned that getting parents together on a regular basis can be a challenge, especially in two-income families and for those who have difficulty finding childcare. "So our solution is to do lots of family events that include the kids," says Ms. Nichols.

"Everything I've tried to do with LINK that's just school-related doesn't draw people in," says Ms. Huber. "If we make it a recreational event, people get involved."

And involvement is the key, since neither Ms. Huber nor Ms. Nichols could do what they do alone. They've both discovered that the more folks they bring in, from both sides of the parent/educator equation, the easier it is to make a positive change for their children.



# TENNESSEE SPOTLIGHT

**Melissa Fortson**, information & referral specialist/program coordinator for Tennessee Disability Pathfinder, has been elected secretary of the Board of Directors of the Tennessee Disability Coalition. In addition to her duties as secretary, she will serve on the Board's Executive Committee. The Coalition is an alliance of organizations and individuals in Tennessee that have joined to promote the full and equal participation of men, women and children with disabilities in all aspects of life.

Partners 04-05 graduate, **Pam Bryan**, has been selected to be a member of the Rosalynn Carter Institute for Caregiving's (RCI) National Quality Care Network (NQC). The mission of the NQC is to develop and disseminate evidence-based practices to support caregivers. The RCI is located at the Georgia Southwestern State University in Americus, Georgia. In addition, Ms. Bryan was accepted as a consumer reviewer on the Department of Defense/Army Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder/Traumatic Brain Injury Research Program scientific peer review committee.

**Gina Lynette**, 03-04 Partners grad, was recently hired by the State of Tennessee as deputy director of Person-Centered Practice. Ms. Lynette will work in the Department of Community Services at the Central Office of the Division of Mental Retardation Services, supporting the current service coordination and case management systems, while helping to infuse person-centered practice into the system's redesign efforts. Ms. Lynette has served as a direct support professional, a PATH facilitator and an officer of the Board of The Arc of Tennessee, and is the parent of two exceptional kids.



Will McMillan and Rachel Putnam

Photo by Neil Brake

**Rachel Putnam** and YLF 2006 Graduate, **Will McMillan**, answered questions and facilitated a discussion about Down syndrome during the Molecular Foundation of Medicine course for first-year Vanderbilt University School of Medicine students. The course is led by Marshall Summar, M.D., Vanderbilt geneticist and member of the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center for Research on Human Development.

At its 46th annual convention held in Minneapolis, Minnesota, the American Council of the Blind (ACB) membership elected **Brenda Dillon** to the position of 2nd vice president. ACB is one of the largest consumer organizations of people who are blind and visually

impaired. Ms. Dillon is currently serving in her fifth year as president of the Tennessee Council of the Blind, and had served six years prior to this position as president of the local chapter. In addition, Ms. Dillon chairs the Nashville Mayor's Advisory Committee for People with Disabilities, as well as the Metropolitan Transit Authority's AccessRide Policy and Advisory Committee.

**Virginia Trotter Betts**, commissioner of the Tennessee Department of Mental Health & Developmental Disabilities (TDMHDD), was recently elected vice president of the National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors (NASMHPD). Commissioner Betts has represented the Southern region on the NASMHPD Board of Directors since 2005. NASMHPD organizes to reflect and advocate for the collective interests of state mental health authorities at the national level.

Partners 05-06 graduate, **Angela Braach**, was recently hired as a district parent trainer with STEP (Support & Training for Exceptional Parents). In that role, she will teach workshops on Basic Special Education Rights to parents in the Middle Tennessee area. Ms. Braach is a member of the Rutherford County Family Support Local Council. This council meets on a regular basis to oversee and provide advice on the distribution of local funds for the Family Support Program.

**The Vanderbilt Kennedy Center (VKC)** has joined the National Institutes of Health Rare Diseases Clinical Research Network (RDCRN), a group of academic medical centers, patient support organizations, and clinical research centers dedicated to developing more effective and individualized treatments of persons with rare genetic disorders. The VKC now serves as the site for the RDCRN consortium on Angelman and Prader-Willi syndromes.

Partners 05-06 graduate, **Elise McMillan**, J.D., has been appointed co-director for the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center's University Center of Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDD). As the former UCEDD associate director and VKC director of Community Outreach, Ms. McMillan has worked successfully for over a decade with community and State partners to develop programs that serve persons with disabilities and their families. She is a board member of The Arc U.S., the Disability Law and Advocacy Center of Tennessee and the Tennessee Council on Development Disabilities, and has served on numerous State commissions and committees relating to developmental disabilities. Ms. McMillan co-directs the UCEDD with Elisabeth Dykens, Ph.D., Professor of Psychology and Human Development and VKC associate director.

At the July 2007 Best Buddies International Leadership Conference, the **Vanderbilt Best Buddies Chapter** was named the Overall Outstanding University Chapter of all college Best Buddies chapters in the world. Over 1,400 buddies attended the conference representing 19 countries and every state.

Best Buddies is a nonprofit organization dedicated to enhancing the lives of people with intellectual disabilities by providing opportunities for one-to-one friendships and integrated employment. Founded in 1989, Best Buddies is an international organization

Photo courtesy of Best Buddies International



Bernadette Resha (left) and Jessi Solomon.

Jasmine, were recently featured in a promotional DVD for a FedEx United Way 2007 Campaign, *Embrace What Matters*. The DVD will be shown across the United States.

**Joanne Cunningham**, Partners 2002–03 grad, completed her special education endorsement over the summer and is hoping to be teaching next year. In June, Le Bonheur Children's Medical Center sent her family to Washington, D.C., for National Association of Children's Hospital Legislative Days, where they met with the legislators from their congressional area in West Tennessee. Additionally, Le Bonheur asked Ms. Cunningham to be the chair of their new Family Partner's Council, working with hospital personnel on helping the hospital and its staff become more family centered.

with more than 1,300 chapters in middle schools, high schools, and on college campuses. Elise McMillan, J.D., VKC UCEDD co-director, is advisor to the Vanderbilt Chapter.

Partners 06–07 grads **Maxine and Michael Freeman** and daughter,

**Tina Marascia**, Partners 06–07 grad, has a Karate clan of her own. All three of her children took the martial arts discipline at TTJC (Tennessee Taekwondo Judo College) with Char Adams in Oak Ridge. Her daughter, **Allie**, is 10 and is an orange belt. Her son, **Robbie**, is seven and a Green Belt who happens to have an autism spectrum disorder. The youngest child, **Tommy**, is four. The TTJC, includes everyone, regardless of ability or disability.

Photo by Tina Marascia



Robbie, Allie and Tommy Marascia

Congratulations to six super Tennessee athletes who represented the State on the U.S. Team at the Special Olympics World Summer Games in China.

**Temeca Bradley** of Chattanooga took a bronze in bowling doubles. **Matthew Drumright** of Brentwood took a bronze in bowling singles. **Shirley Givens** of Lenoir City took a silver in bocce doubles and a bronze in bocce team. **David Perry** of Oak Ridge took a silver in the 4 × 100 meter relay. **David Scott** of South Pittsburg took a bronze in bocce team. **Morgan Smith** of Fairview took a gold in the 4 × 100 meter relay, and a bronze in the 100 meter run.



## TENNESSEE DISABILITY PATHFINDER 2007–2008 DIRECTORY ORDER FORM

The **2007–2008 Disability Services & Supports Directory** is published by Tennessee Disability Pathfinder. It is a source of information regarding state and local programs and services. The manual provides detailed information about each agency, including contact information, address, email, Web site, keyword service categories with program descriptions, counties served, non-English speaking staff availability, and office accessibility. It is offered in East, Middle, and West regional editions for \$25 each.

If you have any questions, email Ashley Coulter at [ashley.coulter@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:ashley.coulter@vanderbilt.edu).



	East	Middle	West	Total Amount Due
2007–2008 Disability Services & Supports Directory (\$25 each)				@ \$25 each = \$ .00
(Quantity of each version)				

Name.....  
 Company.....  
 Address.....  
 City / State / Zip.....  
 Phone.....

**Payment options include cash, credit card, or check.**

Detach, enclose in an envelope and send to:

**Tennessee Disability Pathfinder**  
 1114 17th Avenue South, Suite 105  
 Nashville, Tennessee 37212

615-322-8529, ext. 15  
 800-640-4636 (toll-free)

*Tennessee Disability Pathfinder is a project funded by Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities and Vanderbilt Kennedy Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities.*



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